

JULY 22, 1982

I am just going to go on and pay the \$44.80 that I owe for my mineral interests. Right or wrong, just or unjust, I'll take my settlement and lump it. As I left the courthouse I could hear their laughter up the halls. We'll see who laughs in the end. I'm going to hold back my taxes until the last day of the year.

Perhaps in a couple of years and a few more courtrooms we'll be able to cull the worst of the prairie killers without violating the law. As I reported one time before, coyotes are already so thick out west of the Shortgrass Country they are dying off. Don't misunderstand. There's no threat of wolf shortage or an endangered species situation. My understanding is that the problem is kind of like the population explosion in the cities. The best den sites and waterholes are too crowded to accommodate more animals.

I missed the 1080 hearing that was held in San Angelo in May. At the time, a momma coyote, her pups, and her husband were having a royal feast in one of our pastures. The fact that the hearings were so close to the killing grounds sure set the stage for a lot of anti-coyote sentiment on my part.

On the way to work, I'd read of the previous day's testimony. Upon arriving at the ranch, I could watch the buzzards circling over the fresh kills and switch my pain to reviewing the proceedings in town.

Some mornings I'd make up speeches and do a lot of arm swinging when I opened the gates. I'd think of wild things like printing bumper stickers that say, "your tennis shoes may fit the hiking trails, but keep them out of our sheep pens."

Other times, I'd plan on dragging a dead lamb down the aisles right up to the witness stand. Once there, I'd tell the court that the lamb was a victim, that somewhere his mother was out in a pasture, bleating for her baby, and hurting something awful from a strutted udder. Then I'd calm down and remember that this battle wasn't about lambs or coyotes. It was about driving the sheepman off the public lands. It had to be. Nobody cares that much about a flea ridden wolf or a woolie.

The darkest day for me was the time the paper covered part on how much production expense was being saved by the coyotes thinning out the sheep. I could tell my side was shaken bad by that charge. Not because it was true, but because of the appeal it must have had to the banking community. It'd be just like one of those jugkeepers to get death loss and economy linked together to lead us into a budget of doom that'd sure enough bring on the buzzards.

The papers had other inside information besides that item. Whoever put the lawyer up to asking whether guard dogs that went wrong and killed sheep had psychological problems had plenty of dog savvy. Every sheep killing dog that ever lived a short life suffered from a guilt complex and deep withdrawal. Some of them, after they'd been shelled with rifles and chased across the country in a plane, not only withdrew mentally but lapsed into quite a physical withdrawal. In the old days when there were a lot of chickens for dogs to kill, there were plenty of potlickers in need of therapy, and the ones that didn't get treatment often were in bad need of a bullet proof vest.

I am not going to believe we are winning until I see a white flag unfurled in a courthouse. It's sure rough to have a business that isn't as important as hearing a coyote howl. But it's going to be great if we win and prove them wrong.